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ABSTRACT

Modeling the processes of effective teaching through cooperative learning, creating a community of learners, and other interactive teaching strategies are discussed. As teacher education students become involved in their own reading and writing, they take ownership of their own learning and begin to feel a part of a larger community of learners. Elements such as storytelling, dialogue journals, daily reading aloud, pen pal letters, and shared writing are described within this community of learners approach. Seventeen references are included as well as a list of books recommended for reading aloud. (Author/JD)

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MODELING THE PROCESS: CREATING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS IN READING/LANGUAGE ARTS METHODS COURSES

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Modeling

Modeling as an effective teaching strategy has been called many things, such as participant modeling instruction (Bandura, 1977), mediated learning (Feuerstein, 1980), expert scaffolding, and proleptic teaching (Bruner, 1978; Wertsch, 1979; Vygotsky, 1962). The basic premise of modeling remains the same, regardless of the term used: a process or example is modeled by the teacher or another student, and then students apply the procedure themselves, gaining feedback along the way.

Modeling is important because reading and language arts teachers don't just teach those subjects, they also read, write, listen, and speak themselves. It is perhaps in the act of modeling it, that they are teaching language processes most effectively:

> "A real English teacher tends not only to love reading, writing, and carrying poetry under one arm during coffee break; a real English teacher cannot help but poetize the world - that is, think deeply about human experience through the incantative power of words" (Van Manen, 1986, p. 46).

> "... a good teacher does not just happen to teach math or poetry; a good teacher embodies math or poetry. Good teachers are what they teach" (Van Manen, 1986, p. 47).

Cooperative Learning: A Community of Learners

Cooperative learning calls for students to work together in pairs or small groups to solve problems or accomplish goals by working together (Slavin, 1983). Cooperative learning allows for variety and interaction. In addition, the following outcomes can come from cooperative learning:

"....boosting achievement outcomes and in fostering affective outcomes such as enjoyment of the class and the subject matter, developing prosocial, cooperative relationships among students, and stimulating increased personal contact and acceptance between students who differ in achievement level, sex, race, ethnic background, or handicapping conditions" (Brophy, 1987, p. 22).

Dishon and O'Leary (1984) suggest that the following behviors foster cooperative learning in any classroom: encourage, use names, encourage others to talk, acknowledge contributions, use eye contact, express appreciation, share feelings, disagree in an agreeable way, reduce tension, and practice active listening.

Cooperative learning can lead to a community of learners. A reading/writing community is one in which all class members, including the teacher, read, write, listen and speak to accomplish real goals and to take part in their own learning. Students in such a reading/writing community develop a sense of ownership of their own learning via cooperative learning and modeling.

According to Hansen (1987), this community approach has much to offer everyone in a class:

"A community is composed of individuals, each of whom has a unique contribution to make. The supportive community begins with the teacher's belief that each child has something to share" (pp. 58-59).

"We can't be literate alone. Words change our thoughts. We go forth to do something in the world, to make a contribution. Others value us and help us to value ourselves. Our literate friends listen, talk, write, read, think, support, and challenge us. This community buzzes" (p.64).

Examples of Modeling A Community of Learners in Methods Courses

To create this atmosphere of a community of learners in which modeling and cooperative learning is valued, several

interactive teaching strategies can be used. These apply mostly to reading/language arts methods courses, but could be adapted for other methods courses too.

Storytelling

College students can be asked to prepare a story with props (i.e., picture cards, overhead transparencies, flannel board, or actual objects) for telling to the rest of the class. In addition, a story outline should be provided which notes the story source, characters, problem, resolution, the basic sequence of events that occur in the story, and the materials needed to tell the story. Students can collect these story outlines so that they can tell the stories in their own classrooms. The instructor models this process by presenting various stories with different visual aids to the class. By modeling the process, the instructor gives the students a basis from which to prepare their stories. Feedback is given, not only by the teacher, but also by the class members as the students tell their stories for the rest of the class.

Storytelling has many benefits. Because students are not reading, but rather telling their stories, they can focus more on the audience in terms of eye contact and gaining feedback. Stroytelling develops listening comprehension, builds vocabulary, and stimulates interest in books and stories for children (Nessel, 1985). It also builds trust between class members as they share their stories in a friendly community of learners.

Dialogue Journals

The dialogue journal has been proposed as a means for

providing functional experiences with both reading and writing (Gambrell, 1985; Staton, 1980). In dialogue journal activity, students and teachers "converse" in writing. Teachers responsd to individual student's journal entries by posing questions, making observations, and sharing information, thus establishing a base of personal communication.

For the methods course instructor, the journal provides an additional avenue for teaching. There are opportunities to answer questions that very likely would not be asked in a classroom situation. The instructor and the student can elaborate on selected topics or issues of interest that have been presented in class to a greater degree. The instructor can get to know the students on a more personal level through regular communication. Instructors need to join in the process of writing so that they model the functional aspects of writing for students, as well as correct usage, spelling, and grammar.

Students and instructors usually have positive feelings toward the dialogue journals. As shown in excerpts below from some final entries, students generally approve of the dialogue journal process and recognize its potential as part of an integrative classroom writing program:

"I think it was a good idea because it was the only 'personal' means of communication we had with one another. I plan to use dialogue journals in my own classroom because I feel it breaks down the barrier often found between students and teachers. I know it helped me get to know you a little better."

"Thanks for writing to me. I really like this idea. Your writing helps me understand things a little better."

"At the beginning of the semester, I thought it would be a pain trying to come up with ideas to write about. I realize now what a benefit they are. It has given me a chance to express my personal experiences and attitudes. I have always preferred to write than to speak in class. It has also given me a chance to receive feedback which I thoroughly enjoy. It is nice getting other people's opinions."

Students can write in the journals about topics of their own choice related to class content, or a list of possible topics could be given to them, such as: (1) I disagree with..... (2) I hadn't thought of.... (3) This reminds me of.... (4) I've seen children.... (5) Here's how I think I could apply that in my class.... and so on.

Daily Reading Aloud

By reading aloud to a college class, the instructor is modeling appreciative listening, as well as reading for enjoyment. Reading aloud to students stimulates their thinking, motivates them to explore children's literature, gives them a sense of language appreciation, and helps to strengthen group cohesivesneess through a shared experience and a sense of continuity. Trelease (1985) argues that reading aloud and talking to a child have similar benefits:

"to reassure, to entertain, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire" (p.1).

Reading to children can have a profound effect on them:

"When the teacher slowly closes the book, there is silence in the room. Even those children who were not really touched by the story refrain from talking for a moment. This silence has mood as well. It is not just an absence of sound or voices. It has a tonal quality all its own. In the stillness of the book that closes, the story lingers and charges the silence with reflection. It is the silence of reflection, or reckoning. This silence has a different atmosphere from the silence that reigns when every child is working individually at a math text" (Van Manen, 1986, pp. 36-37).

There are many good children's books that make wonderful reading aloud material. A picture book or a chapter in a novel could be read at the end of every class session. (See Appendix A for a list of recommended books.)

Modeling the process of reading aloud does much more than just telling preservice teachers the importance of reading aloud. As students listen to stories being read to them, often their love of children's literature is rekindled and their curiosity about other books is sparked.

It is also important for preservice students to gain experience in reading aloud themselves. There are several ways to facilitate this practice. Students can do choral or group reading of poetry written for children. For instance, students can adapt many of the poems in The New Kid On The Block by Jack Prelutsky into oral interpretations and group reading. Readers' Theatre is another way to involve students in meaningful oral reading. In Readers Theatre, an excerpt from a book or story that includes mostly dialogue is read aloud. Students should read the various dialogue parts using a great deal of expression as they practice reading aloud for and with each other.

Pen Pal Letters

Another interactive teaching idea is to have pen pals. University students and the instructor can be pen pals with elementary students. Students at both levels can benefit from this experience. This provides college students with a unique opportunity to view the writing development of a specific child over a 16-week period. Writing a letter to a child also gives

them practice at offering praise and reinforcement while initiating and sustaining an ongoing conversation in print. At the end of the semester a visit to the pen pals at their school could be made to bring closure to the experience.

Sharing Writing

To educate students about current writing process theory, students need to be involved in meaningful writing throughout the class. They could be placed in writing groups to share their writing, or they could do so in an author's chair. The author's chair is a place for a writer to sit and read his/her own writing to other students. Those listening often ask questions, offer positive comments, and help the writer think about how s/he might develop the piece of writing. By using an author's chair, writers begin to believe in themselves as authors as they gain feedback from their peers and their teacher (Graves and Hansen, 1983).

Conclusion

Instead of traditional teacher-directed instruction, methods courses need to model the interactive teaching processes that they profess so that students can truly gain perspective for how to set up such a classroom on their own. By taking ownership of their own learning, students can internalize the process and can become readers and writers themselves, enhancing their abilities to then teach reading and writing.

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Trelease, J. (1985). The read-aloud handbook. New York: Viking.

Van Manen, M. (1986). The tone of teaching. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). Thought and language. (E. Hanfman & G. Vakar, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wertsch, J. (1979). From social interaction to higher psychological processes. Human Development, 22, 1-22.

APPENDIX A: Recommended Read Aloud Books

Picture Books:

Ackerman, Karen. (1988). Song and Dance Man. Ill. by Stepehn Gammell. New York: Knopf.

Blos, Joan W. (1987). Old Henry. Ill. by Stephen Gammell. New York: Morrow.

Blume, Judy. (1984). The Pain and the Great One. Ill. by Irene Trivas. New York: Bradbury.

Brown, Marc. (1986). Arthur's Teacher Trouble. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Browne, Anthony. (1986). Piggybook. New York: Knopf.

Cooney, Barbara. (1988). Island Boy. New York: Viking.

deRegniers, Beatrice Schenk, et. al. (1988). Sing A Song Of Popcorn. New York: Scholastic.

Fox, Mem. (1984). Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge. Ill. by Julie Vivas. New York: Kane/Miller.

Goble, Paul. (1987). Death of the Iron Horse. New York: Bradbury.

Kellogg, Steven. (1985). Chicken Little. New York: Morrow.

Lester, Helen. (1988). Tacky the Penguin. Ill. by Lynn Munsinger. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Locker, Thomas. (1988). Family Farm. New York: Dial.

Marshall, James. (1987). Red Riding Hood. New York: Dial.

Marshall, James. (1986). Yummers Too: The Second Choice. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Martin, Bill and Archambault, John. (1987). Knots on a Counting Rope. Ill. by Ted Rand. New York: Holt.

McKissack, Patricia C. (1986). Flossie and the Fox. Ill. by Rachel Isadora. New York: Dial.

Nixon, Joan Lowery. (1988). If You Were A Writer. Ill. by Bruce Degen. New York: Four Winds.

Noble, Trinka Hakes. (1987). Meanwhile Back at the Ranch. Ill. by Tony Ross. New York: Dial.

Prelutsky, Jack. (1984). The New Kid On the Block. Ill. by James Stevenson. New York: Greenwillow.

Purdy, Carol. (1985). Iva Dunnit and The Big Wind. Ill. by Steven Kellogg. New York: Dial.

Rylant, Cynthia. (1982). When I Was Young in the Mountains. Ill. by Diane Goode. New York: Dutton.

Steig, William. (1988). Spinky Sulks. New York: Farrar Strauss Girioux.

Steptoe, John. (1987). Mufaro's Beautiful Daughter: An African Tale. New York: Lothrop.

Stevenson, James. (1987). Higher On The Door. New York: Greenwillow.

Turner, Ann. (1985). Dakota Dugout. Ill. by Ronald Himler. New York: Macmillan.

Van Allsburg, Chris. (1985). The Polar Express. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Van Allsburg, Chris. (1988). Two Bad Ants. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Yolen, Jane. (1987). Owl Moon. Ill. by John Schoenherr. New York: Philomel.

Yolen, Jane. (1987). Piggins. Ill. by Jane Dyer. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Novels:

Byars, Betsy. (1988). The Burning Questions of Bingo Brown. New York: Viking.

Byars, Betsy. (1977). The Pinballs. New York: Harper & Row.

Conrad, Pam. (1985). Prairie Songs. Ill. by Darryl S. Zudeck. New York: Harper & Row.

Dahl, Roald. (1988). Matilda. Ill. by Quentin Blake. New York: Viking.

DeFelice, Cynthia C. The Strange Night Writing of Jessamine Colter. New York: Macmillan.

Gardiner, John R. (1980). Stone Fox. Ill. by Marcia Sewall. New York: Crowell.

Greenwald, Sheila. (1988). Write On, Rosy! (A Young Author In Crisis). Boston: Little, Brown.

Hahn, Mary Downing. (1988). December Stillness. New York: Clarion.

Lowry, Lois. (1987). Anastasia's Chosen Career. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

MacLachlan, Patricia. (1988). The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt. New York: Harper & Row.

MacLachlan, Patricia. (1985). Sarah, Plain and Tall. New York: Harper & Row.

Mooser, Stephen. (1984). Orphan Jeb at the Massacree. Ill. by Joyce Audy dos Santos. New York: Knopf.

Pollack, Pamela. (1988). The Random House Book of Humor. Ill. by Paul O. Zelinsky. New York: Random House.

Smith, Robert Kimmel. (1987). Mostly Michael. New York: Delacorte.

Speare, Elizabeth George. (1984). Sign of the Beaver. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Thomasma, Kenneth. (1983). Naya Nuki: Girl Who Ran. Ill. by Eunice Hundley. New York: Baker House.